

Featured Dojo-cho, October 2017



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Division 2

I am proud and happy to have been a part of the development of Aikido in California over the last 47 years. I started my Aikido practice in 1970 as a first-year student of art and music at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Co-teaching the classes there were two of the pioneers of American Aikido: Robert Frager (currently 7th dan, Western Aikido Association), and Frank Doran (currently 8th dan, California Aikido Association). I am deeply grateful for their instruction and support over all the years. It's a sweet feeling to continue to see them multiple times each year and savor our long connection.

It is a blessing to have a teacher who inspires your practice. In that way I am multiply blessed. In America, the teachers who have personally influenced me include Robert Nadeau, Mitsugi Sotome, Mary Heiny, and the late Hiroshi Kato, Stan Pranin, and Terry Dobson.

In 1973, I moved to Japan to study Aikido. I spent most of my 3 years there living and training in the remote, beautiful, very traditional area of Kumano, where the founder of Aikido was born and raised, and buried. O-Sensei's memory and spiritual inspiration were strong in the Senseis in Kumano: the late chief instructor Michio Hikitsuchi; Motomichi Anno, Motoichi Yanase, and the late Yasushi Tojima. Their teaching, and their example of lifelong dedication to O-Sensei's Way, transformed my life.

Upon my return to the USA, my dear friend Jack Wada tricked me into beginning to teach Aikido! He was the chief instructor in Santa Cruz at that time (1976) and asked me to cover for him while he went back to Japan (Kumano) for 6 months of further training. I was very reluctant to do so, but Jack convinced me, saying, "Don't worry, you'll do a great job!" Six months later he wrote to me that his plans had changed and he would not return to Santa Cruz. "Don't worry—you'll do a great job!" he repeated. And the rest, as they say, is history. I've been teaching in Santa Cruz now for 40 years!

Aikido of Santa Cruz is a non-profit, educational organization and a large, lively dojo with a long history that started with Frager Sensei's first classes in town, in 1969. Currently we offer 21 classes a week for youth, adults, and beginners. 21 years ago we fulfilled a long-held dream and purchased our own building, in order to ensure a permanent dojo in Santa Cruz. The Grand Opening celebration in 1997, attended by my first Aikido teachers and so many people in the Aikido community, was one of the happiest days of my life.

But there have been so many "happiest days" in my Aikido life! I was unbelievably happy when in 1999, I was able to bring the teacher who had most inspired me in Japan, Motomichi Anno Sensei (8th dan), to teach in Santa Cruz for the first time. It has been an honor to facilitate his visits for the last 18 years. In 2013, after years of research, translation and writing, I published a book of Anno Sensei's reminiscences of O-Sensei and the teachings of love, purification, and gratitude that are at the heart of Aikido. The book tells the history of Aikido and O-Sensei in Kumano, Anno Sensei's Aikido life, and my own journey to Japan in the 1970's. If you haven't yet read *Journey to the Heart of Aikido: The Teachings of Motomichi Anno Sensei*, please do!

My Most Memorable Aikido Experience

In searching for my "most memorable experiences in Aikido," I find that the most profound among them are the sudden, vivid experiences of Oneness---those times when the mystery of interconnectedness is revealed as undeniable truth. So many moments on the mat....when the lightest touch, or no physical touch at all, affected me powerfully and sent me flying. The experience of wordless, heart-to-heart communication with my Senseis; and deep connections

with my own students. Returning to visit the grave of O-Sensei each year, affirming the spiritual lineage that flows through Aikido. Feeling the palpable joy in the air, uplifting us all, in the multi-dojō community of the Summer Retreat in Santa Cruz.

And in recent years, I've been deeply moved by the experience of sharing Aikido, and its transformative experience of Oneness, with people of different countries and cultures. Thank you, O-Sensei, for this vision of a peaceful world, and how we can and must move in that direction.

*“Understand Aikido first as budo and then as the way of service to construct the World Family.”
– Morihei Ueshiba O-Sensei*